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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR THANKS IRAN DEMOCRACY ADVOCATES FOR  
THEIR WORK

REF: STATE 108924

Classified By: Ambassador Robert H. Tuttle for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Per reftel request for Chiefs of Mission worldwide to underscore U.S. support for democracy advocates, Ambassador met October 11 with two UK-based Iranian expatriate journalists to thank them for their years of advocacy for human rights and democracy in Iran and to lead their discussion of Iranian government and popular views of U.S. policy on Iran nuclear and security issues. Nazenin Ansari, who heads the UK's Foreign Press Association and writes for leading English and Farsi newspapers and on-line services, and Ali Reza Nourizadeh, author and daily commentator on VOA Farsi broadcasts to Iran, briefed the Ambassador on the appetite of the Iranian public for outside news, Iranians' views of the nuclear confrontation, and on the measurable effects international financial sanctions are having on Iranian trade. Ansari said a U.S. military attack on Iran, whether limited or full-scale, would hurt rather than help those within Iran who support democracy and human rights. Both thanked the Ambassador for U.S. leadership in bringing pressure on the Iranian regime and argued the UN should broaden travel and visa restrictions to include the family members and close associates of regime leaders not now affected by UN and U.S. anti-terrorism or anti-proliferation-based designations. Ansari said USG policy on Iran must be closely linked to human rights in Iran; failure to do so will discredit other U.S. agendas in Iran among Iranians. Nourizadeh said U.S. messages to the Iranian people are most effective when senior U.S. figures publicly communicate respect for Iranian culture and national sensibilities; senior U.S. figures should use this approach repeatedly, whenever they want to make any policy point to the Iranian public. End summary.

Non-Regime Media Has an Audience  
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¶2. (C) The Ambassador asked about Iranian regime views of Nourizadeh's commentaries on Voice of America satellite radio broadcasts, which Nourizadeh claimed are heard by 15 million persons per day inside Iran; Nourizadeh did not explain the source of his figures. Nourizadeh claims the regime

leadership, keenly aware of the internal Iranian audience VOA enjoys, also listens to VOA broadcasts and often crafts the IRI's next-day messages to respond to VOA information or reports displeasing to the regime.

#### Impact of Military Action in Iran

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13. (C) The Ambassador asked whether Iranians view U.S. military action as inevitable, in light of widespread UK and international media speculation about the possibility of the U.S.- Iran confrontation escalating into war. Ansari said a U.S. military attack on Iran, whether limited or full-scale, would hurt rather than help those within Iran who support democracy and human rights. A U.S. military strike aimed specifically at Iran's nuclear facilities would have the effect of uniting the country behind the regime, including the millions of Iranians who are not at present enthusiastic about Iran's nuclear stance. She argued that, even if such military action prompted unrest among certain Iranians or civil disturbances within the country, the regime would quickly regroup, and support within the regime's working class and rural core constituencies, as well as its firm hold on the security services, would be unshaken. Arguing "in Iran, perception, not reality, is everything," she said whatever politically benign motives underpinned U.S. Government action would be lost amid the regime's comprehensive, highly effective propaganda countermeasures; she also warned of very costly "regional consequences" in the event of a U.S. attack. Despite her cautions, Ansari also argued that behavior change by the Iranian Government is impossible without regime change; she maintained that the

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current regime, due to its essential character, "will never change its behavior," but that U.S. policy objectives do not take this political dynamic into account. (Embassy comment: UK-based Iranian expats with whom we speak have, in the months following the USG's increased emphasis on behavior change by Iran, adopted "behavior change requires regime change" as a standard polemic. End comment.)

14. (C) Nourizadeh said that, although many callers to his VOA broadcast make emotional appeals for a U.S. attack, the regime is highly confident of success in the event of a U.S. attack. The IRI, as the USG was already aware, had focused heavily on its asymmetric warfare capabilities; he remarked that new IRGC commander Jafari has been developing his own thinking on asymmetric warfare for many years. Both Nourizadeh and Ansari told the Ambassador that the regional repercussions of any American attack would be enormous, and further argued that the regime's international comments on the possibility of a nuclear confrontation are aimed primarily at the Arab street. Both maintained that Iran's defiance of the West on nuclear development is far more popular in the Arab world than within Iran, where Iranians, starved for multiple sources of information, are alternately proud of their country's growing stature, but also worried and uncomprehending.

#### U.S. Position on Nuclear Development Unknown to Iranians

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15. (C) The Ambassador asked what the view of the Iranian street was on the nuclear issue: Nourizadeh stated that the United States has never effectively communicated its policy to average Iranians. Whether this gap has been due to regime repression or to inadequate strategic communication by the USG, Nourizadeh was uncertain. He was adamant, however, that Iranians, universally, do not comprehend that the West has been offering Iran support for a peaceful nuclear program. He has repeatedly reported the West's offer in his own radio commentaries, but a gap in popular Iranian understanding and perception persists on the nuclear issue.

Sanctions Are Biting: Enlarge the Pool

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¶6. (C) The Ambassador noted that the United States will continue to lead the international effort on international sanctions, both in the UN context and, increasingly, via EU partners. Both Nourizadeh and Ansari agreed international financial sanctions are a good way to pressure the regime and "are biting," and asked for more of the same. Nourizadeh, who travels frequently to Dubai, claimed that the increasing difficulty of obtaining any letters of credit worth over one million dollars are making the lives of Iranian exporters and importers much harder there.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador asked for views on possible additional points on which the United States could usefully pressure the regime: Ansari argued for a broadening of U.S. and international travel and visa restrictions to include the family members and close associates of regime leaders not now affected by UN and U.S. terrorism or proliferation-based designations. She and Nourizadeh said it was frustrating to Iranian democracy advocates, and a mockery of international sanctions policy, that immediate family members and known close business associates of senior regime leaders could travel freely, study, bank and holiday in the United States and the West, even if "their father or husband or boss" were designated under existing U.S. or international authority. They pointed to recent international travel by family members of ex-President Rafsanjani as one example. Poloff noted hard data and specifics on international travel, study and banking by close relatives and associates of senior IRI personnel would be welcome data (Embassy comment: Embassy recognizes there are competing considerations in whether to target individuals and family members for travel restrictions, including the opportunity in some cases to reach out to

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decision-makers. The comments of these and other Iranian democracy advocates with whom we speak in London suggest, however, that the U.S. Government may want to weigh that consideration against the belief of democracy advocates that broadening restrictions on the travel of close regime associates and family members does affect the behavior of recalcitrant authoritarian regimes. End comment.)

Iran in Iraq  
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¶8. (C) The Ambassador asked Nourizadeh, an Arabic speaker, about Nourizadeh's observations following his recent visit to Iraq. Nourizadeh claimed to have seen Quds Force personnel establishing a significant business and retail presence throughout southern Iraq; he agreed Iran is "paying off everyone in southern Iraq." Ambassador noted U.S. forces will continue to defend themselves in Iraq, including decisive action when necessary against the Quds Force in Iraq; Nourizadeh agreed pressure on the Quds Force has a strong, desirable impact on Iran regime decision-makers, who, according to Nourizadeh, are most responsive "to this kind of pressure." Nourizadeh commented that he had, many months before recent U.S. Government public statements on the Quds Force ties of Iranian Ambassador Qomi in Baghdad, made similar revelations about Qomi in his own on-line and radio reporting.

Human Rights Matter in Iran  
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¶9. (C) Ansari closed by arguing that whatever course U.S. Government policy on Iran takes it needs to be linked very directly and publicly to human rights within Iran; failure to do so will discredit other U.S. agendas in Iran among Iranians. Nourizadeh said U.S. outreach is most effective when senior levels repeatedly and publicly communicate their respect for Iranian culture and national sensibilities: such a recitation should regularly accompany any and all key policy points U.S. leaders wish to make to the Iranian

public.

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